

# Democracy

Fifth Estate Collective

1976

“Mistuh Chairman,” the fleshy faced delegate droned, “the Great State of Mississippi, last bastion of slavery, casts all of its redneck ballots for...CLICK!”

“CLICK!” The sound was unmistakable—all over America, in cities and small towns, high-rise apartments and wooden shacks, people were busy flipping their television sets to another channel as the Republican party exposed itself on all three major networks for nearly a week of unending boredom.

Earlier this summer, when the Democrats did their thing, people were turning off this similar show and switching the dial to the movie on Channel 50 or the re-run on Channel 9 or the test pattern or gazing out the window to watch the grass grow or anything, anything but this ghastly spectacle of grown men and women screaming and kowtowing for hard-core softball player Jimmy Carter or Jerry Ford, the dullest humanoid to be projected into living rooms since Neil Armstrong toolled around the moon in his space car.

But beyond the fact that the conventions were not hits with the Neilson ratings, it is becoming more and more obvious in this election year that people are doing more than switching the political parties off TV: as the political rhetoric goes up, people’s participation in the American political game is going down. Voting, never exactly America’s favorite pastime, is fading quicker than an August meteor, much to the politician’s dismay.

The recent Michigan primary election was a perfect example. At issue were dozens of supposed important political posts, especially in Wayne County, where a nomination on the Democratic ticket virtually assures victory in November.

But after millions of dollars of publicity, massive amounts of hot air, widespread visual pollution in the form of billboards and other signs, the final result was that less than one-quarter of the state’s registered voters even bothered to trudge a block or two to the polls.

But even that figure is misleading. While only 24.6 percent of all registered voters actually went to the trouble to pull a lever, one tends to forget that most Michigan residents are not registered voters. In fact, out of a state population of 8,875,078 only 1,105,594 people voted—7,669,484 didn’t.

Obviously not all those seven million no-shows are eligible to vote. But even if one counts only Michigan residents 18 or over, 4,418,114 people still stayed away from the polls.

## Disenchanted Michigan Electorate

The *Free Press* captured the mood in a piece the Sunday before election day describing how the campaign was mostly-a dud. “It seemed that the only way to interest the disenchanted Michigan electorate would have been to declare open season on politicians and sell hunting licenses,” read a story on the papers front page. Pretty suggestive stuff, but nobody took the hint.

People have evidently made up their minds that their problems will not be solved but only aggravated by electing politicians to office; no matter how sweet sounding their pitch or party. It may not be the most revolutionary thing

to do; somewhere some political chump is probably licking his or her chops mumbling, “It only took Marvin Esch 200,000 votes to get nominated, ahhhh.” But in any case, political no-shows, like the no-shows at Pontiac Stadium, feel the game will be the same without their attendance.

You would never get the feeling that most people don’t give a flying hoot about this political hooliganism by reading the papers or watching TV. The media may report how voting is on a long downward trend, but when it comes to conventions or elections, stories on everything except the color of the band around the candidate’s underwear are plastered all over page one.

Editors insist readers and viewers get this Massive political news dose even though the supposed way news is judged—its importance to the readers—would seem to suggest that all this copy be honed down and buried on the obituary page or more precisely—on the comic page. However, an editorial positioning commensurate with its newsworthiness would announce to all that politics is held in contempt by the majority of people and would seriously undercut the attempt to portray the world of political activity as one of importance to anyone other than the politicians and their friends in the media.

Even though the conventional wisdom says people tune in anything but these quadrennial circuses (if they have the option), the three networks spent \$25 to 30 million to cover the Republican shenanigans alone. As it turned out, the most exciting thing that was shown was a birds eye view of Nelson Rockefeller in, his cups. Media types outnumbered delegates at Kansas City four to one; *The New York Times* flew in 53 people to bring the nation news of what most people consider a non-event. Of course, one shouldn’t place all the blame on the major parties since as usual, the several off-the-wall parties were acting equally ridiculous this summer with their usual results: they were ignored in greater numbers than usual.

The Socialist Labor Party, Communist Labor Party, U.S. Labor Party, (You Labor—They Party) the Socialist Workers Party and the Libertarian Party all ran candidates in various precincts in the August primary but none received the 3,500 votes necessary to place them on the November ballot, a new requirement stemming from a Michigan law passed in April.

The parties filed a successful suit in federal court in Detroit contesting the law, saying it was unconstitutional, and as a result, people who do make it to the polls will have the chance to ignore them again in November.

## **Small Parties Same as the Big**

But these parties, like the older, larger parties, just fail to see the writing on the wall. People don’t figure they are going to have anything but a negative effect on their lives, despite promises of “jobs, peace and equality,” like the current claims of the Communist Labor Party.

The parties aren’t giving up, even though several polls predict that less than half of all the registered voters in the U.S. will vote this November. Both the Republicans and the Democrats are plopping down \$3 million each in a nation-wide effort to sign up unregistered voters. The GOP’s plight is especially dismal since only 18 percent of the voting age population calls itself Republican. Forty-six percent are registered Democrats.

The UAW, forever fighting for any Democratic hack who comes down the pike, are also doing their bit in this all-out effort to sell Americans the idea that voting is good for them, spending up to \$1 million itself to register black voters. Only half of all blacks of voting age are registered and less than one-third voted in the last presidential election.

Perhaps the farthest-out effort to sell people democracy is occurring in Las Vegas of all places. There, University of Nevada psychologist Joseph Rainey is attempting to use a computer to match voters’ wants with candidates.

“Voting is just not a functional act anymore,” says Rainey when someone asked him—why he’s bothering. The scheme isn’t working so well, however, because of what Rainey calls the “antagonistic” attitude of the candidates. It seems they are refusing to fill out his questionnaires.

Dick Gregory once quipped that if people thought democracy was so cool, they’d steal it and politicians wouldn’t have to force it down their throats.

This Spring, when thousands of beleaguered New York college students gathered on the steps of the state capital to protest the state's drastic education cutbacks, one of the speakers waltzed up to the mike and urged them to get out and register to vote. He was promptly hooted off the platform.

Recently, two people were overheard walking past U.S. Senate candidate Donald Riegle's campaign headquarters on Washington Boulevard. "Be part of the solution—volunteer," said one of the pair, reading aloud a sign in the office window. "Be part of the problem—run," the other answered.

### **Text of leaflet accompanying article**

Nobody keeps his campaign promises. Nobody deserves to live off your taxes. Nobody can legislate your freedom.

NOBODY IS THE PERFECT CANDIDATE!

If you think that Nobody represents your interests, VOTE FOR NOBODY

If you think Nobody should run your life, VOTE FOR NOBODY

If you think, VOTE FOR NOBODY

# fifth Estate

Fifth Estate Collective  
Democracy  
1976

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/276-september-1976/democracy>  
Fifth Estate #276, September 1976

**[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/276-september-1976/democracy)**